

Wednesday
September 8th, 2028
19:41 hours (PST)

"Coffee, black," Nathaniel announced, standing in front of the food replication system on the Astro Omega Ship. There was beep, followed by a flash of light as the system began to hum. Moments later, a cup of coffee materialised.

He grabbed it, heading back over to the panel. It wasn't until he sat down that he realized how much coffee he'd been drinking. His entire work station was littered with empty coffee cups, all of them scattered around the table.

"Computer. Time," he called out.

"1942 hours," the computer announced.

Until that moment, he hadn't paid much attention to the passage of time. Now that he was aware of just how late it was, it occurred to him that he hadn't left the Omega Ship in days.

He didn't let that fact bother him, taking a sip of his coffee to wake him up, picking up a pad and going over his work. The hard drives from the shuttle they retrieved from the planet were horribly damaged, and he had been working around the clock to recover the data.

He couldn't understand what the circumstances must have been to have his father and Z leave their morphers behind on the shuttle, especially with a Vorhsoth on board. *And why was only the blue ranger still in the shuttle,* he wondered.

The planet was much too far away from the sun in that system for any human to survive on the surface for any prolonged period of time, so he ruled out that they left the shuttle. Judging by the damage done to the outer hull, he speculated that the Vorhsoth found its way onto the hull while it was still in space, then caused the damage that would have forced the shuttle to land. *More like crash,* he thought.

Where would they have had to have gone to encounter a Vorhsoth, he wondered. He picked up another pad, reviewing the navigational data from the shuttle, trying to determine where it had been.

"Hmmmmm," he said out loud, not realizing he'd said anything, but he found something interesting in the navigational logs. "Computer, confirm that these logs are intact and free of any corruption," he said.

"Working," there were a moment of silence as the computer worked. *"Confirmed. Navigation data at 100% integrity,"*

"Have they been altered in any way?"

"Negative. No alterations have been made."

"Well that just doesn't make any sense. How do you account for the electron buildup? Then there is a huge gap in the coordinates. Its as if they jumped over 200 light years," he said.

"Please restate the question."

"I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to... myself? Wow Nate, you have officially gone crazy," he said, taking another swallow of his coffee, looking at the data again.

"Computer, search the database for electron energy over the last 50 years and cross reference it with the readings from the navigational logs from the shuttle. When was the last time SPD encountered an energy signature like this?"

"Working," there was a pause. *"September 1st, 2028. July 17th, 2025. February 16th, 2004. May 8th, 2019. August 7th, 2017..."*

"Stop. Open files on September 1st encounter. Who filed those mission logs?" he asked.

"Lt. Commander Serenity and Ensign Ella Enrile. Mission log filed by Gabriella Rodriguez."

"On that mission, where there any other unusual energy signatures?" he asked.

"Sensors detected a thoron burst on the date in question."

"That was probably from the implosion device that leveled the warehouse," he said, finishing the last of his coffee.

"Negative." the computer announced.

"What are you talking about? One of the Xybrian scientists used a thoron device to destroy the warehouse. It's in the log," he pointed out.

"Negative. No evidence of an implosion detected."

"Then what happened to the warehouse?" he paused, comparing the logs from that mission to the logs on the shuttle. "Why would there be an electron buildup in both places? Computer, is there any evidence of thoron energy signatures onboard the shuttle?" he asked.

“Affirmative.”

It was at that moment that it occurred to him, amazed that it had taken him so long. He turned to another panel, pressing a button.

“Ensign Carson to Commander Tate,” he said.

There was no response.

“Ensign Carson to Lt. Commander Serenity. Come in,” he said.

There was no response.

“Computer. Where are Commander Tate and Lt. Commander Serenity?”

“Commander Tate and Lt. Commander Serenity are in containment cell three,” the computer announced.

“Open a com channel.”

“Unable to open channel. Communications restricted.”

Nathaniel stood up, rushing off the ship.

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Ella stood in between Serenity and Commander Tate, staring into the cell of the Vorhsoth child. She was fascinated by it; the way it moved, and how even the lack of moment seemed to be deliberate.

“I don’t understand what you need me to do, sir,” she admitted.

“Everything in our intelligence reports indicate that the Vorhsoth are mindless animals operating on instinct alone. We want you to determine if that is the case or not,” he said.

“If this things operates on anything more than base instincts we need to know,” Serenity added.

Ella took a step forward, staring at the creature. She focused on it, tuning out everything else in the room. She tried to hear its heart, to sense its intentions.

"It knows something," she said, closing her eyes. She reached out, gently grazing the force field that kept it contained in its cell.

Both Commander Tate and Serenity were amazed as the creature mimicked her, placing her hand on the other side of the force field... directly where hers was.

"It's afraid," Ella said.

"It should be," Serenity said.

"No, not of you," she paused. "Its afraid of..." she stopped in mid sentence. "Open the cell," he said.

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"I'm sorry ensign, but no one is allowed in the containment area without written permission from Commander Tate," Lt. Herrington said, standing outside of the entrance with a phase rifle in hand.

Across from him as Lt. Oliver, who also had a rifle in hand.

"Guys, I get that you have orders, but this is important. The entire station is at stake here. I *have* to get there," Nathaniel told them.

"We have our orders ensign," he said.

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"No, no way," Commander Tate said.

"Sir, I need to be in there. I'll be fine, I promise," Ella told him.

"This isn't the family pet, ensign. This thing is a killer. This thing will not only destroy you, it will..."

"It won't."

"Are you willing to bet your life on that?" Serenity asked.

“Yes, sir. I am.”

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“I've asked nicely, but I'm afraid if you guys don't step aside, I'm going to have to go *through* you,” Nathaniel asked them.

“There are two of us and one of you. And we're armed, ensign. Stand down before you get hurt,” he said.

Nathaniel sighed, realizing this was going to end badly for them. *Commander Tate will probably strip me of rank for this, but they are leaving me no choice*, he thought to himself.

He stood ready, preparing to make his move, but before he could, it was Garr who walked up behind him. He grabbed both of the rifles by the barrels, yanking them forward. The both fell to the floor, and before Lt. Herrington could get up, Garr stepped down on his back, grabbing his wrists and handcuffing his hands behind his back. Lt. Oliver tried to move, but Nathaniel picked up his rifle, stunning him with it.

“Hello, friend,” Garr said with a smile.

“Hey buddy. Perfect timing. I need to get into these cells,” he pointed to a keypad near the door. “You're head of security. Can you get me in?”

He nodded. “Garr try.”

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Commander Tate, against his better judgement, entered the code to the cell, lowering the force field. The field shut down, and Ella stepped in slowly, approaching the creature.

“Hello there, I'm Ella,” she said cheerfully.

She reached out, touching its shoulder slightly. The creature responded by almost leaning in to her and began to vibrate slightly, emitting a humming noise.

“Is it...”

Serenity nodded. “Its purring,” she sighed.

"You don't have to be afraid, little guy. I'm here to help," Ella assured it.

The creature stepped forward, almost as if it was embracing Ella. She leaned in as well, allowing it.

"It wants desperately to communicate, but doesn't know how. He has something to tell us and its listening, hoping that it hears the right word to use to say it to us," she said.

"Does it intend to hurt us?" Commander Tate asked her. "Is it in communication with others of its kind?"

"Its alone. It wants to tell you..."

She was interrupted as the doors to the room opened as Nathaniel and Garr walked in. Commander Tate held his hand up, indicating for them to stop where they were.

"Sir, I..."

"Wait," Serenity said.

Nathaniel looked over to see his sister and the creature embracing. He wanted to lunge in, to help her, but Garr put his hand on his shoulder urging him to wait.

"It has something to show us. There are no words for what it wants to say," Ella said softly.

"What are you proposing?"

"Let it lead us where it wants to go," she said.

"Absolutely not. That thing is not leaving this area," he said. "I respect your ability, ensign, but there is nothing you can say to make me change my mind."

"B-b-but..." it stopped. "Buttery," the creature said.

"Dad," Nathaniel sighed, tears forming instantly in his eyes.

"Are you saying this thing is..." he was interrupted.

"No, but it spent time with my dad," she paused as it backed away, slowly stepping out the cell.

Commander Tate wanted to make a move, but Serenity shook her head. They all stood aside as the creature cautiously stepped out, turning its head slightly.

"I think it..."

Before Ella could finish her statement, the creature dropped to all fours, then bolted through the exit and down the hall.

Commander Tate hurried over to a panel on the wall. "Priority one. Orange alert. All SPD personnel, we have a priority one breach. Seal all non essential areas and engage security grid. This is not a drill," he said.

The lights in the entire station went out and were replaced by an orange light. Alarms blared.

Ella fell to her knees. "What have I done?" she sighed.

"You can feel sorry for yourself later. Right now we have work to do. D-Squad, lets get to work," Serenity said.

Nathaniel and Garr nodded. Ella got back to her feet and rushed out in pursuit of the creature.

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"Whats going on?" Madison asked, glancing around the infirmary as all the lights went orange. Steel reinforced plating slammed down over the windows.

"Somethings going on, but it doesn't look like we're going to be able to get out there to do anything," Asia mentioned.

"Whatever it is, sounds like this is a job for the Phantom Ranger. Whatever we have to do, we better hurry. I need to be out there," Nik insisted.

Madison nodded, reaching for Nik's hand. He obliged her, and she reached out, grabbing the former Phantom Ranger's hand.

"Are you in possession of the energem?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Okay, let's do it," she closed her eyes and began to concentrate. "Nihil temere quaedam verba intelliguntur qui in anglicus."

Asia watched as the energem in Nik's pocket began to glow. The glow seemed to surround him, then worked its way up his arm and to Madison. Soon, the energy engulfed her as well, then began to flow its way towards the former Phantom Ranger.

"Nihil temere quaedam verba intelliguntur qui in anglicus," she repeated.

The red light got brighter, eventually filling the room. Asia turned her head, shielding her eyes. The light subsided, and Asia glanced up to see Nik had been replaced by the Phantom Ranger, and the former phantom ranger was gone.

Madison let go of his hand, then collapsed to the floor. Asia leaned down, helping her up.

"Are you okay?"

"I... I'm fine," she sighed.

Asia turned to the Phantom Ranger. "Nik? Are you in there?"

"Yes. We both are," he said, immediately noticing that there was a duality to his voice. He heard his own voice, but another one as well. "We feel energized. Alive. Powerful," he told her.

"Then get out there and figure out what's going on. I'll take care of Madison," she promised him.

He nodded, pressing a button on his forearm, then disappeared.

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Serenity, Ella, Nathaniel and Garr followed the trail of destruction left behind by the creature. Several officers were scattered in its path, but it continued to move. Because it was so late in the evening, there weren't very many officers in the promenade area, and for the few that were, they took cover as the creature rushed through.

"From the looks of it, it's heading to the morgue," Serenity said as they ran.

"We have a morgue?"

"It's where we keep bodies until autopsies can be performed. I think it... it's going after Max Cooper," she said.

"But why?"

“Finish job,” Garr suggested.

“That can't be it. If it just wanted to hurt people, it would be tearing into people. Its deliberately bypassing everyone in its path and heading towards Max. But why?” Ella asked.

“We're done talking to this thing. Everyone set your phase pistols to the highest setting and shoot to kill,” she ordered.

“We don't have to kill it.”

“We tried it your way, El. We have to end this here and no or no one on this station will be safe,” she said.

They arrived at the morgue a few moments later, where the creature had torn through the mortuary cold chambers, pulling out the body of Max Cooper.

Serenity stormed in, aiming her pistol and was preparing to fire, but the Phantom Ranger materialized in front of her.

“Stand down,” he said, placing his hand on the barrel of the pistol.

“Are you out of your mind Nik? We have to kill this thing before...” she was cut short as she realized the creature had simply curled up next to Max' body and began to purr.

“It... it missed him,” Ella sighed.

The creature began to nudge at Max' waist area with its head. Even Serenity had to take note that, if it wanted to tear through Max' flesh, it could have. Instead, it seemed to be motioning to something.

Ella walked over to it, quickly going through the pockets on Max' uniform.

“What are you doing?”

Ella pulled a pair of containment cards out of Max' pocket, holding them up. The creature began to purr again.

“Buttery.”

“Could it be?” Serenity sighed, lowering her pistol and taking the cards from Ella. “These cards are in use.”

“What do you mean?”

"I mean something is being contained," she input a series of codes onto the cards, then set them down.

Within seconds, both Z and Bridge materialized in front of them. Z stumbled back, but the Phantom Ranger caught up.

"Thanks," Z said.

"Dad!" the twins screamed in unison, running over to him and wrapped their arms around him.

"I see you got my message. Good boy, Gary," he said, reaching over and patting the creature on the head. The creature began to purr even louder.

"Gary?" they all asked in unison, all of them sounding equally confused.